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Senate wants answers from Myers

In response to a report in The Denver Post, the incoming chairman of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee has asked a federal appeals court nominee to explain discrepancies between the facts of The Post's story and his answers to the Senate panel about contacts with convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

William G. Myers III, nominated by President Bush for a seat on the San Francisco-based 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, told senators reviewing his confirmation that he had no contact with Abramoff.

But The Post reported Sunday that, according to Myers' official schedule, he attended a 2001 party organized for Abramoff and his clients to lobby Bush administration officials who oversaw Indian gambling.

At the time, Myers was the U.S. Department of the Interior's solicitor.

Asked about the discrepancy, White House officials told The Post that Myers was at the event but said he didn't talk with the lobbyist, who pleaded guilty in January to conspiring to bribe public officials.

In a letter to Myers dated Tuesday, Sen. Patrick Leahy, who will be chairman of the Judiciary Committee when the new Congress is sworn in next month, said he wanted "clarification of information you have given the Senate Judiciary Committee in connection with your nomination ...

"In written follow-up questions to your confirmation hearing, I asked about any contacts you may have had with lobbyist Jack Abramoff," Leahy wrote. "In your March 9, 2005 answers to my question regarding what contacts you had with Mr. Abramoff while you were Solicitor at the Department of the Interior, you wrote, 'I do not recall having any contact with Mr. Abramoff.' ...

"The Denver Post reported on December 3, 2006 that documents obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request indicate that you attended a September 24, 2001, party at which Mr. Abramoff and his clients lobbied Bush administration officials who oversaw Indian gambling," Leahy added. "You were serving as Solicitor at the Department of the Interior at the time.

"Please explain this discrepancy between your testimony to the Judiciary Committee and the documents obtained by The Denver Post."

Myers is an Idaho lawyer with a number of past and present ties to Colorado. Myers maintains a relationship with the Denver-based law firm of Holland & Hart. Before serving as Interior solicitor, the agency's top lawyer, he was a lobbyist for Centennial-based National Cattlemen's Beef Association. He received his law degree from the University of Denver College of Law.

He is one of a handful of Bush's judicial appointees who have been blocked or stalled by Senate Democrats in recent years. A longtime Western lobbyist for grazing and energy interests, Myers is opposed in his nomination by a number of environmental and civil-rights groups.

Shortly after last month's elections, Bush renominated Myers and four other controversial appeals-court nominees.

Democratic senators have long asked whether Myers had links to Abramoff, who tried on behalf of his tribal-gambling clients to influence the Interior Department, which regulates reservation casinos.

Records show Myers was one of several top Interior officials at the 2001 party, along with then-Interior Secretary Gale Norton. About 24 people attended at the Georgetown home of GOP fundraiser Julie Finley.